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HISTORICAL ADDRESS

AT THE

DEDICATION

OF THE

SOLDIERS' MONUMENT

IN BARKHAMSTED,

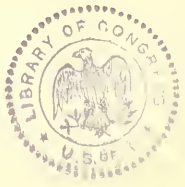
SEPTEMBER 10, 1897.

BY

WM. WALLACE LEE,

OF

MERIDEN, CONN.



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Wm Wallace Lee

Historical Address,

BY WM. WALLACE LEE.

Mr. Chairman and Fellow Citizens:

Since the Centennial of this town was observed in 1879, each year it has been the custom of our people to assemble on September 10th to renew our friendships and strengthen the ties which bind us as neighbors, friends and kindred, and to-day we add another link in the chain, for we have dedicated a monument to the memory of our soldiers in all the wars for the past 125 years. In the veins of a large majority of our people the same blood runs, and although many of the names inscribed on this monument are now extinct in the town, they are not forgotten, as our action to-day shows. What I shall have to say on this occasion will deal largely of the men of the earlier wars. It is not my purpose to ignore the men who kept our Nation undivided, but all the records of that war have been kept in an admirable manner; the name, residence and final record of every soldier is there shown. Thousands upon thousands of those who participated in it are among us to-day, and engaged in the keen activities of life. The story of toil, fierce conflict, privations and sacrifices is told every day to eager ears and willing listeners, and received with absorbing interest, as we all hope will be the case for many years to come, and because of that, and because of our lack of time and the additional reason that so little is known of the earlier struggles, I shall deal more largely with them to-day.

Just before the struggle for independence as a Nation began, in 1774 the Colony of Connecticut had a population of 198,356

whites, and 6,464 "blacks" as they were called. Barkhamsted had 250, Colebrook 150, Hartland 500, Winchester 327, New Hartford 985. Perhaps it is well to state here that these towns were named and plotted as townships by the Colonial Assembly in 1732, and Barkhamsted was said to contain 20,531 acres. Whether any of this land that stands edgewise was counted twice, I have no knowledge. It must be borne in mind that the plotting and naming a township in those days was not an act of incorporation; that came later and in each case was a separate act. Most of the earlier towns had a central point of settlement, and the large majority, who became residents, had their homes near the central point, the settlers being largely friends and neighbors in the several towns from which they came, and about their first act was to establish religious worship and build a "meeting house." Barkhamsted seems to have been settled "around the edges," so to speak, the first settler being near the line of New Hartford, and the second or third in the Northeast part of the town. There was a large number of people and houses on Center Hill as early as 1772, more than there is to-day. One hundred years ago that section had more than double the number that is living there now, and the same is true of the Wallen's Hill section. The town was incorporated and divided into two societies in 1779; at that time two-thirds of the people of the Winsted society were residents of this town. The Eastern border, and especially Ratlam, was thickly settled as early as 1780. Nearly all the early settlers were on the hills, for along these four mill streams was heavy timber, tangled vines and swamps, which could only be cleared away "by degrees," as it is said "lawyers get to heaven."

It has always been represented that this town was about the last section of the State that was made and that the inhabitants were very poor, in fact, rather below par. The story used to be told of a very zealous but illiterate Methodist in a town nearby, that when solicited to assist in raising means for the Wesleyan University at Middletown, so that their ministers might have better facilities for education, he replied, "that he didn't see no need on't; 'twasn't necessary for a man to be edicated to preach. The Apostles were all good preachers, but none of 'em was edicated, they were only fishermen and such like; even Paul, the greatest one among 'em was

brought up at the foot of Gammel's Hill, and everybody knew that was a low down, ignorant place; people that lived there didn't know nothin'." A similar idea has seemed to prevail about people of this town.

A Military Company was organized here in 1774, Peletiah Allyn, Captain. (He must have been the senior for the junior was then only twenty years old). Israel Jones was Lieutenant, (he too must have been the senior for the junior was only twenty,) John Norton, Ensign. There is no roll of members in existence that I know of. As most of the settlers were young men, it is safe to say that at that time there were at least fifty subjects for Military duty, (from 18 to 50), and probably more. I have prepared a catalogue of them all, so far as it is possible to gather the information, but there is not time to read it here even if you could remember it, (as I know you could not), which gives the names, time of service, etc., of all those who served as soldiers in that struggle, who are in any way identified with the town.

I am certain that more than fifty and probably more than sixty were residents of the town at the time of service. A large proportion, but no greater than all through the Colony. Of the total population of Connecticut at that time (for it is not probable there was much increase, if any, during the war) there would be from 40,000 to 50,000 subject to Military duty.

There were at least 5,000 Loyalists, as they called themselves, (commonly called Tories), I think nearer 10,000; the larger proportion of which were in Fairfield County. They were mostly of the Protestant Episcopal Church, honest in their convictions, looking upon revolt against the State and Church, for in England they were closely connected, as a sin against God and lawful authority. They were treated very harshly; of that there is no question, and doubtless thought life hardly worth the trouble of living. The men who opposed the Government in our last war had a "bed of roses" in comparison with the Tories.

The Conn. Records contain something over 28,000 names of men who served in some capacity during that struggle. That list represents at least 35,000 different men. You may ask how I know this; because in a great many cases the same name was borne by several different men as you will see in the Cata-

logue. There are forty-five of the Lee name in that book, and I know from my records they represent seventy different men. I am certain that the William Taylor that was killed at the Danbury raid was not the William Taylor that some of us knew, who died in this town in 1835 and is buried at the Center. I do not believe that the Timothy Tiffany that was killed at the battle of White Plains in 1776 is the Timothy Tiffany that was pensioned in 1840, as a soldier, then living in Hartland. The David Barber that is buried in the Hollow I am very confident is not the David Barber that was killed in 1777. I know from records in my possession there were six different Samuel Lees in the service, and this Catalogue of 130 names that I have prepared represents more than 180 different men. I am certain that from 35,000 to 40,000 was furnished from Connecticut in that eight years' struggle. They got small pay, and much of that was worthless; many of us can remember that Continental currency, a pocketful of which would not buy a bushel of grain. If the advocates of a paper currency had lived in those days they could easily have secured an ample supply and found what it was worth.

I do not know that any of these men were ever lauded as heroes. I never saw any one of them pictured "on the outside of a horse" at a safe distance from the battlefield with a drawn sword pointing towards the enemy. I never heard that any one of them was voted a medal or sword by Congress, or publicly thanked for his bravery. Perhaps as prominent as any one of the number was Israel Jones, Jr., and he retired from service as Captain. He lived in what is now the oldest house in town (I think) for it was sold in 1771 to Israel Jones by Simon Baxter, (he called it "my mantion,") who was afterwards a Tory and went to Halifax. It stands about one-fourth of a mile north of the Universalist church, and is now occupied by James N. Howard. It is one of the few houses of that age now standing in New England, concerning which there is no tradition that General Washington ever staid there over night, or stopped to take a drink.

The men who by toil, labor and sacrifice made us a Nation, are dust and ashes long ago. They were plain, earnest, unpretentious men who were faithful to duty as they saw it, and we do well to place their names upon bronze and granite for the coming generations to reverence and admire; and I am

somewhat proud of the fact that we as a town, are the first to place their names thus before the public. Some of them I knew and admired and would fain linger upon the subject, but I well know the limitations of the hour.

The war of 1812-15 was a small affair in comparison with the struggle to establish the independence of the Nation. Another generation, sons of the "men of 76" were at the helm of State, and managing public affairs. It did not command a hearty support in New England. It was looked upon as originating in the South and intended for their special benefit. New England had large shipping interests that would be injured by it, and was strong in its opposition to the doctrine of "protection," as expounded and defended by Mr. Calhoun, You can see, friends, that times have changed since then, or at least politics have. While the people of Connecticut furnished only from 2,000 to 3,000 for the Regular Army in that war, it furnished over 10,000 men to guard the coast and defend this State from invasion. These were mostly volunteers, all for short terms of service, and a very few drafted men. I think no English soldier landed in Connecticut, nor was there a life lost by conflict of arms. Between forty and fifty of the men of this town shared in that service, such as it was, and they are duly classified in the Catalogue.

Again in the Mexican war much the same conditions prevailed, and but few, in proportion, to the population of the North, responded to the call for troops from the General Government to prosecute a war, which, as Mr. Calhoun said, was carried on for the benefit of "the peculiar institutions of the South." I find the names of seven only who can be claimed as of this town, and they are duly placed in the Catalogue. Only one of that number is living, so far as I have knowledge, and we greet him as the sole survivor and as the last man now living in this town, whose father was a soldier of the Revolution, and we call him Colonel Hodge.

I must pass briefly over the causes which led up to the war of 1861–5. The South had mainly controlled the policy of the Government from its organization, and it is the first instance in all history, so far as I have knowledge, of a revolt of the property class against the Government, where they had always made its laws, shaped its policy and had their own way, simply because they were voted out of control. We hear much

now of monopoly, combinations, trusts, etc., and it comes largely from those who defended a monopoly that had behind it four billions of dollars, and defended it until it was trampled to death by the American people on more than 2,000 battle-fields. They had been told that the men of the North would never fight to preserve the Union, for their friends at the North would never allow them to invade the soil of sovereign States, etc. Never were a people more greatly mistaken. The thunder of cannon around Fort Sumter awakened honest, earnest lovers of country and right, that had long been blind to all the dangers which some men foresaw. Never in all human history was there a grander awakening ; never a grander response. In the words of one of our Connecticut poets :

> "They came from the hillside ; they came from the glen ;
> From the streets thronged with traffic, and surging with men ;
> From loom and from ledger ; from workshop and farm,
> The fearless of heart and the mighty of arm.
> As the mountain-born torrents exultingly leap
> When their ice fetters melt to the breasts of the deep,
> Like the winds of the prairie, like the waves of the sea.
> For the Union they rallied, these sons of the free,
> And they flung out their banner, the old starry banner,
> Their father's proud banner, the flag of the free."

Men of all creeds, parties and sects, rallied, animated by a common impulse to raise the flag which had been torn down by those who had sworn allegiance to it, and pledged their faith to the Government and to each other to replace it there at whatever cost.

Let me relate an instance showing that spirit in men whom many of you know :

After the firing on Fort Sumter, a Democrat of this town prominent in his party, visited a brother Democrat in New Hartford and proposed to him to enlist (and I have the story from him), but he replied "you know we are Democrats. We can't well mix in this matter ; you know what we have said and how we have voted," the response came promptly, "I don't care a d— what I have said or how I have voted, I am going in for the old flag !" You men of New Hartford know well the story of Drum Major Benjamin G. Loomis, whom as a soldier you buried a few years since.

The other is here to-day and we greet him as a soldier of two wars, the oldest one now living in this town and the longest record of service, Colonel Justin Hodge. Now let me tell

another, which came under my own observation. A personal friend and I used often to discuss these questions during the campaign of 1860, and, in a heated discussion, he made this statement: "If this thing ever comes to a fight I will draw my sword for the South." "No you will not," was the reply. "What is the reason I will not?" "Because you think too much of the flag." After the firing on Sumter, I watched him closely. He was so excited he could not work, but walked the streets. That night a war meeting was held; he was present, was called upon to speak. He stepped upon the platform and said: "I can't talk; I never made a speech in my life," and turning to the flag, said: "I have followed that flag over the world; it has protected me in every port, and by ——— I'll protect it now." You who know how he led the Second, H. A., in that terrible charge at Cold Harbor know how Elisha S. Kellogg kept his word. Let me relate another of one born and reared in this town, for remember, friends, to-day we are not talking of Generals and noted heroes, but of plain, common men. This man had enlisted in the Seventh C. V., had been in several battles, and shared in the fortunes of that Regiment. It was at the time when the men were asked to re-enlist as Veterans. I wrote to him not to re-enlist, saying, "You have done your share; you have a wife and four small children; they need you; mine are dead, I can go. If the Government needs more men from our family, let them give me a place; I can do a man's duty somewhere, even with my disability." The reply came at once: "I have re-enlisted; the Government needs me; I will see the end of this or it shall see the end of me." He was the oldest of the brothers whose name is on the brown stone monument in the Valley Cemetery.

These instances show the spirit which animated the great mass of the common people; a deep, earnest determination to maintain our Nation at whatever cost of life or treasure. There is not time to follow the long story of four weary years, the at times despairing wail; when it almost seemed as if God had forsaken us, until at length the long wished for victory came and the survivors returned to receive the welcome plaudits and congratulations of an undivided and redeemed Nation.

To-day after weary years of waiting, of hope often deferred, we dedicate and set apart for all coming time, a monument bearing the names of those of our boys who helped to win in

that struggle. Let the morning sun touch it with its gladsome rays and its departing beams gild it with mellow light. Here, near "where the forefathers of the hamlet sleep" let it stand through all the coming years; here let children and children's children come to read the names and hear the story of the men who helped to make, defend and preserve the best Government yet given to man.

Suffer me in closing to use the language of a Western poet (it is better than anything I can compose), a tribute to his dead comrades:

The patriots sleep in the land of their choice,
In the robes of a martyr all gory,
But they heed not the tones of a world-waking voice
That would cover their ashes with glory.
What reck they of riches, what care they for fame,
Or a world decked and garland in beauty?
If the marble shall speak that records each proud name,
They died at their post doing duty.

The pilot who stood at the helm of our bark,
Unmoved by the tempest's commotion,
Was swept from the deck in the storm and the dark
And sank, 'neath the depths of the ocean.
But little he'll reck of the life that it cost,
If our flag shall still float in beauty,
And emblaze on its folds of the pilot we lost,
He died at his post doing duty.

The warrior chieftain has gone to his rest,
The sod of the mountain his pillow,
For his bed, the broad earth has opened its breast,
His dirge is the ocean's sad billow.
As long as the ocean wave beats on the shore,
And our valleys shall bloom out in beauty,
So long shall our Country its heroes deplore
Who died at their post doing duty.

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